

Hunger at Home

Hunger is an issue that is brought to our awareness in a dramatic way from time to time; we see horrible images of starving people in some war-torn and far-away country, then soon forget about the plight of these people when the news images fade away. The truth of the matter is that hunger is a persistent global problem. About 24,000 people die every day worldwide from hunger or hunger-related causes (*The Hunger Project, United Nations*). This number is stunning and shows us the enormous magnitude of this problem and that the issue of hunger is always with us. It is often much closer to home than any of us realize.

According to an August 2002 report from Brandeis University's Center on Hunger and Poverty, over 11 million households, constituting more than 33 million individuals in the United States reported limited or uncertain access to sufficient food due to inadequate resources. Nearly 3.3 million of these households reported experiencing hunger.



Hunger and Poverty in Arizona

At the state level, the rate of food insecurity and hunger varied considerably from state to state during the 1998 to 2000 study period (*Hunger and Food Insecurity in the Fifty States*, Center on Hunger and Poverty, August 2002). Food insecurity occurs when the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways, is limited or uncertain. Among the states, the prevalence

Food Security:

Access to enough food at all times for an active and healthy life. At a minimum, food security includes: the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies).

Food Insecurity:

Occurs when the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or the ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways, is limited or uncertain.

Hunger:

The uneasy or painful sensation caused by a recurrent or involuntary lack of food and is a potential, although not necessary consequence of food insecurity.

-Center on Hunger & Poverty:

USDA, 1999

of food insecurity ranged from a low of 7.5% of households in New Hampshire to a high of 15.9% in New Mexico. Comparatively, Arizona does not fare well. Arizona ranks sixth highest in the rate of food insecurity, with 13.13% of all households experiencing food insecurity, considerably above the national average of 10.8% of households.

Arizona also ranks poorly in state-level comparisons of residents living in poverty. Where there is poverty, there are those who do not have enough to eat or are unsure of where they will find their next meal. Here in Arizona, 698,669 were living below the federal poverty level in 2000; that's 13.9 percent of the total population. Perhaps most disturbing, 306,865 of those living in poverty are children under the age of 18, and nearly one in four of those children (24.8 percent) are under age five.

When children are undernourished the consequences snowball; the child's future success is at stake, which has long-term societal implications as well. Children are

particularly prone to the damaging effects of food insecurity and hunger. Studies from the Tufts University Center on Hunger have shown that children from low-income families who attend school hungry perform significantly below their non-hungry low-income peers on standardized test scores. The lack of proper nourishment increases educational failure by decreasing attention span and memory and by causing an inability to perform tasks. An educational disadvantage occurs from poor concentration, poor problem-solving, poor thinking/reasoning skills and abilities, a lack of stamina, and increased susceptibility to illness.

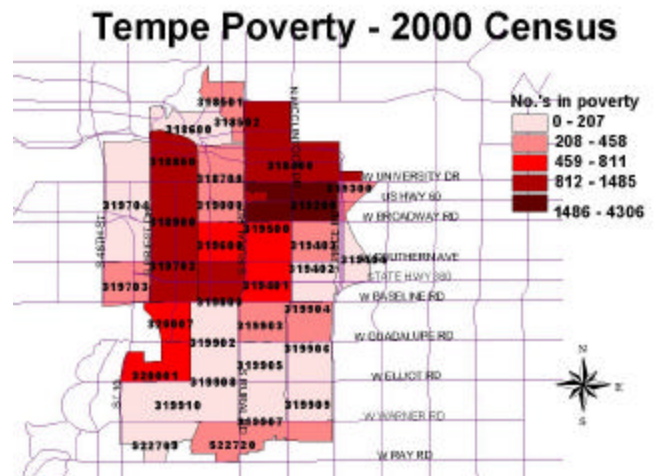
Poverty in Tempe

For most of us, Tempe is perceived as a thriving, vital college town. Poverty and hunger are not issues that are present and obvious as we go about our daily lives; however, for many in our community, poverty is an ever-present reality—just meeting basic needs is often a daily concern. In fact, 14.3 percent of Tempe’s total population lives below the poverty level. This number is even greater than the overall percentage living in poverty in the State, and is considerably greater than the Maricopa County rate of 11.7 percent. A significant number of Tempe’s poor are children, with 14.4 percent under the age of 18 and 18.1 percent age five and under living in households with an annual income below the federal poverty level.

Clearly, the need for assistance is great here in Tempe, as evidenced not just by the census figures, but also by the significant number of requests for food boxes received by our local safety-net organizations. Over the past five years, the number of emergency food boxes distributed by Tempe Community Action Agency (TCAA) has increased from 1,754 in FY1998 to 2,406 in FY2002—a 37 percent increase. Notwithstanding this significant increase, TCAA reports that the need in the community is not fully met.

Tempe’s poverty rate is especially stark when viewed in comparison with the rate of our neighboring East Valley communities.

City	Percent of population below poverty level
Chandler	6.6
Gilbert	3.2
Mesa	8.9
Tempe	14.3
Scottsdale	5.8



Food Distribution in Arizona

The Association of Arizona Food Banks provides detailed and up-to-date statistics on hunger and emergency food distribution in Arizona. They recently reported that in 2001, their emergency food bank network distributed more than 122 million pounds of food, an amount equivalent to feeding every person in the city of Yuma (population 77,515) three meals a day for an entire year. Even so, the Association of Arizona Food Banks

Tempe Food Pantries / Food Box Providers

Tempe Community Action Agency
2150 E. Orange St., Tempe, 85281

Salvation Army Tempe Corps
40 E. University Dr., Tempe, 85281

Society of St. Vincent de Paul
2121 S. Rural Rd., Tempe, 85282

Faith Evangelical Free Church
1050 E. Southern Ave., Ste D, Tempe,
85282

reports that there remains a significant gap between the number of hungry people in Arizona and the ability of existing food programs to feed them. Forty-six percent of Arizona food banks reported having to “stretch” food supplies to meet the demands for emergency food services.

Through the Tempe Community Council Agency Review Process, the City of Tempe funds United Food Bank to help with the distribution of food assistance in our community. They serve as the hub of a network of more than 240 social service agencies, providing access to nutritious food through organizations that serve people in crisis. From July 1, 2001 through June 30, 2002, United Food Bank distributed over 10.8 million pounds of food throughout their distribution area. In the first quarter of this year (July through September), 163,727 pounds of food were delivered

to 12 Tempe agencies.

While organizations such as United Food Bank distribute food to agencies with food pantries, food banks and social service providers rely heavily on the generosity of citizens to keep their cupboards full. While we most often think to give to those in need around the holidays, hunger is not just a seasonal problem. The summer months often find service providers struggling to fill their pantries.

We should all be mindful of the fact that protein items (peanut butter, canned meat and tuna) and packaged dry-goods (boxed cereal, rice and pasta) are urgently needed throughout the year. As you are clipping coupons and notice grocery store sales, consider purchasing an extra item or two for our local food pantries.

Bottom Line

In this country of plenty, grocery store shelves are never empty, even in the worst of times. We are extremely fortunate and should always be grateful. However, even though food is on the shelves it does not always get to those who are most in need, especially nutritious foods. In the hierarchy of needs, having well balanced meals each day is at the top. Without proper nutrition, especially in childhood, our health declines as well as our ability to think and reason. For those living in poverty the strength to take the necessary steps to achieve self-sufficiency is diminished without regular, balanced meals. One of the most significant ways to help is also one of the simplest. No one should have to go to bed hungry in Tempe.



Tempe Empty Bowls

Last February, an interfaith coalition of community volunteers organized the first Empty Bowls event to be held in Tempe. This event was held on Saturday, February 23 at Tempe Town Lake in Tempe Beach Park. This first-time effort was considered a great success, as \$8,000 was raised for United Food Bank's Kids' Café program.

State Representative Meg Burton-Cahill, Joe Mann and Dino Castelli busy throwing bowls for Tempe's inaugural Empty Bowls event.

The volunteer planning group,

representing the following congregations, University Presbyterian Church, the LDS Stake Centers, the Islamic Cultural Center, Desert Palm United Church of Christ, Temple Emanuel and University Lutheran Church, partnered with Tempe Community Council and the City of Tempe to provide logistical and staff support. Whole Foods Market donated all of the soup and bread for the event. SRP, Alpha Graphics, and the Tempe Union High Schools Education Foundation as well as area citizens provided generous contributions and support, helping to make this event a true community-based effort.

There is a story about a man who left this earth and was taken on a tour of the inner realms. He was shown a room where he saw a large group of hungry people trying to eat dinner, but because the spoons that they were trying to eat with were longer than their arms, they remained frustrated. "This" his guide told him "is hell." "That's terrible!" exclaimed the man; "Please show me heaven!" "Very well," agreed the guide, and on they went. When they opened Heaven's door, the man was perplexed to see what looked very much like the same scene: there was a group of people with spoons longer than their arms. As he looked more closely; however, he saw happy faces and full tummies, for there was one important difference: the people in Heaven had learned to feed each other.

-Unknown

This group enlisted the talents of several local potters and relied significantly on Tempe schools to make ceramic soup bowls for the event. Contributing schools include: Corona del Sol, Desert Vista, Marcos de Niza and McClintock High Schools, as well as McKemy, Connolly, Gililand, Fees and Akimel A-al Middle Schools, Curry Elementary School, the Phoenix Metro Islamic School and Tempe Accelerated High School. The ASU ceramics club and various church youth groups also contributed bowls for the event. In all, over 2,000 hand-crafted bowls were available for a minimum donation of \$10. With this \$10 donation, individuals also received a simple meal of soup, bread and water, representing the number of calories per day on which many people in the world must subsist.

In addition, a special silent auction offered event guests the opportunity to bid on bowls designed/signed by "Local Celebrities" and artists. Event Proceed will benefited United Food Bank's Kids' Café program at three Tempe sites: the Tempe Boys and Girls Club at the Westside Community Center, Tempe First Assembly of

God Church and the Tempe Thomas J. Pappas School for Homeless Children. United Food Bank anticipates that at least 234 needy children per day will receive a meal or nutritious snack at their Kids' Cafe host sites in Tempe with help from the Empty Bowls event proceeds.

How Can I Help?

Please join us and bring your family and friends to the 2nd annual Tempe Empty Bowls Event to be held **Saturday, February 22nd, 2003 at Tempe Town Lake in Tempe Beach Park**. In addition to hand-crafted bowls available for a \$10 donation, there will be musical entertainment, a special silent auction of bowls designed by local artists, and soup and bread donated by Whole Foods Market and offered free with the purchase of a bowl. Proceeds will again benefit United Food Bank.

Planning is currently underway. If you would like to volunteer to help, please contact Martha Cronin at Tempe Community Council (480-858-2301).